

(Kaṅkhā) Revata Sutta

The Discourse on Revata (the Doubter) | U 5.7/60
Theme: Spiritual purification through overcoming doubt

Translated by Piya Tan ©2010

1 Kaṅkhā Revata

1.1 KAṅKHĀ REVATA’S LAST LIFE. The Majjhima Commentary says that there are two monks called Revata, namely, Khadira, vāniya Revata (of the acacia forest),¹ the youngest brother of Sāriputta, and Kaṅkhā Revata (the doubter), and identifies them (MA 2:247). Kaṅkhā Revata comes from a very wealthy brahmin family in Sāvattī. One day, after his noon meal, he goes with others to hear the Buddha teach and, accepting the Buddha Word, he renounces the world. According to the Apadāna, this happens in Kapila, vatthu (Ap 539.12/2:491).

He gains arhathood through attaining dhyana, and is declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of those monks who are dhyana-attainers (*jhāyī*).² Before he attains arhathood, he is greatly perplexed regarding what is permissible for him to use and what is not (for example, whether mung beans is allowable to be consumed or not).³ Hence his name, Kaṅkhā Revata, Revata the doubter (UA 314).

Revata is often mentioned in the company with other eminent disciples, such as Anuruddha, Nandiya, Kimbila, Kundadhāna and Ānanda.⁴ **The Mahā Gosinga Sutta** (M 32) records a discussion amongst Moggallāna, Mahā Kassapa, Anuruddha, Revata and Ananda, where Revata is praised as the highest type of monk, the one who delights in meditation and leads a peaceful solitary life.⁵

In the **Uttara, mātu Peta, vatthu** (Pv 2.10), Uttara’s mother, having been born as a preti (female preta), on account of reviling her devout son who offered the four supports to the monks). She wanders about for fifty-five years with neither food nor water. When she tries to drink water, it turns into blood. One day, she meets Revata spending siesta on the banks of the Ganges, and begs him for succour.

Out of compassion, it is said, Revata offers water to the sangha in the preti’s name. After his alms-round, he offers it to the monks. Having found some rags from the dust-heap, and cleaning and preparing it, offers it to the monks. As a result, the preti is relieved of her suffering state, and is reborn as a deva.⁶

Kaṅkhā Revata appears to have survived the Buddha.

1.2 HIS PAST LIVES. In the time of Padum’uttara Buddha (the 16th Buddha before our Buddha),⁷ Revata was a brahmin of Hamsa, vatī, well versed in the Vedas. One day, while listening to the Buddha, he heard him declare a monk in the assembly as the foremost of those monks who practised dhyana, and he himself wished for the same honour under a future Buddha.⁸

To that purpose, he continuously performed various good deeds. After various rebirths amongst humans and the gods, for a hundred thousand world-cycles, he is reborn, in the time of our Buddha, into the family of a wealthy brahmin in Sāvattī.

2 Purification by overcoming doubt

The (Kaṅkhā) Revata Sutta (U 5.7) is a very short text on the Buddha making an utterance (*udāna*) inspired by the sight of the monk Revata sitting in meditation, reviewing his own purification by crossing

¹ See Tha 43; on Sāriputta’s praise of him, Tha 991 f. Sn 212 of **Muni S** (Sn 1.12) alludes to him, too (SnA 261 f). On his story, see **Revata-t,thera Vatthu** (AA 1:230 f; DhA 7.9/2:188-200 incl Buddha’s visit; ThaA 1:34 f); on his past, see DhA 26.29/4:186 f.

² A 1:24; U 5.7/60; AA 1:230 f; Tha 3; ThaA 1:33 f

³ *Akappiyā muggā, na kappan ti muggā paribhuñjitum*, UA 314; cf V 1:210. *Mugga* (Skt *mudga*), Phraseola mungo is the mung bean.

⁴ As in **Naḷakapāna S** (M 68.2/1:462) = SD 37.4.

⁵ M 32.5/1:213 = SD 44.12.

⁶ Pv 2.10/331-339/39 f; PvA 140-144.

⁷ Padum’uttara is the 13th of the 24 Buddhas: see **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14) = SD 49.8 Intro (2).

⁸ Ap 539.1-9/2:491.

over doubt.⁹ This expression “**purification by overcoming doubt**” (*kaṅkhā, vitarāṇa, visuddhi*) is found in only two places in the early texts, namely,

- (1) **the Ratha,vinīta Sutta** (M 24.9/1:147,23) = SD 28.3;
 (2) **the (Kaṅkhā) Revata Sutta** (U 5.7/60,5) = SD 32.15.

In the Sutta’s concluding verse, the doubt (*kaṅkhā*) is said to be about the here or the beyond [§6a*], about oneself or others [§6b*], that arise as we meditate. In other words, here *kaṅkhā* is synonymous with *vicikicchā*, both often translated as “doubt.” In fact, the Madhyama Āgama version specifies this doubt as *vicikicchā*: 疑蓋 *yigài*.¹⁰

The commentary to the (Kaṅkhā) Revata Sutta explains that Revata is reviewing his purification of overcoming doubt achieved through full liberation. It specifies that through the wisdom of the supramundane path, he has gone beyond any doubt related to speculations about a self in past, present or future, as well as beyond any doubt regarding the Buddha, the Dharma or the Saṅgha. (UA 315)

This closely relates to the purification by overcoming doubt to the attainment of *streamwinning*, since to go beyond such speculations and to have firm faith in the Three Jewels are qualities of a streamwinner, one who through the strength of personal realization has completely removed doubt.¹¹ In other words, Revata here is at least a streamwinner.

However, to ascertain this point, we need to look closer at “doubt” and its removal in other discourses. According to **the Dhammasavana Sutta** (A 5.202), for example, doubt can be overcome while listening to a discourse on the Dhamma.¹² Though listening to the Dhamma may at times occasion streamwinning, but this is not always the case. Several discourses report junior monks visiting elder monks and posing them questions in order to “remove their doubts.”¹³ These instances do not seem to be related to the attainment of streamwinning, but only to such monks improving their theoretical understanding of the Dharma or to clear their doubts about their practice.

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⁹ On this section, see esp **Analayo**, “The seven stages of purification: A comparative perspective,” 2005:126-138.

¹⁰ MĀ 9 = T1.430b29. The MĀ version here apparently takes this to be not as the removal of the “fetter” (*samyojana*) of doubt, but only a removal of the “hindrance” (*nīvaraṇa*) of doubt. While the former has to do with progress of insight, the latter only relates of meditation progress. See Analayo 2005:129. See further *Vyāpāda* = SD 32.5.

¹¹ The expression *kaṅkhā pahīnā* occurs in the first section of **Diṭṭhi Saṃyutta** (S 24.1-18/3:203-216) as a quality of a streamwinner. Similarly, **Sabb’āsava S** (M 2) relates going beyond speculations regarding a self in the past, the present and the future to overcoming the 3 fetters, viz, streamwinning (M 2.11/1:9,21). Furthermore, wise faith in the Three Jewels as a special quality of a streamwinner is a recurring theme in **Sotāpatti Saṃyutta**: see any of the 10 suttas in S 25, esp S 55.2/5:343,27.

¹² The Sutta lists “overcoming doubt” (*kaṅkham vitarati*) as one of the benefits of listening to the Dharma (A 5.202/3:248,3).

¹³ **D 34.2.1**(1)/3:285,9; **M 33.22/1:223,36**; **A 3.20/!**:117,31, **8.2/4:152,8**, **10.11/5:16,5**, **11.18/5:352,14** speak of experienced monks answering such questions and thereby removing the doubts (*kaṅkham paṭivinodenti*) of the junior monks. None of these passages bears any explicit connection to streamwinning.

The Discourse to Revata (the Doubter)

U 5.7/60

- 1 Thus have I heard.
- 2 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika's park in Jeta's grove near Sāvattihī.
- 3 Now at that time, the venerable Kaṅkhā Revata was sitting cross-legged not far from the Blessed One, keeping his body upright, reviewing his own purification by crossing over doubt.
- 4 The Blessed One, saw the venerable Kaṅkhā Revata sitting cross-legged not far away, keeping his body upright, reviewing his own purification by crossing over doubt.
- 5 Then the Blessed One, understanding the significance of this, uttered this udana [inspired utterance] at that time, thus:
 - 6 *Yā kāci kaṅkhā idha vā huram vā* Whatever doubt there be as regards here or there,¹⁴
saka, vediyā vā para, vediyā vā whether about knowing oneself or knowing others,
ye jhāyino tā pajahanti sabbā the meditator has abandoned all that,
ātāpino brahma, cariyam carantā ti fervently living the holy life. = Ap 539.15/2:493

— evaṃ —

100414; 100415; 101117

¹⁴ *Idha vā huram vā*. “Here” (*idha*) refers to this life or this world, while “there” (*huram*) is “the other world, in another existence. As a preposition, it can mean “before,” as in “Before (hearing) the Buddha’s Teaching...” (Sn 1084; Nm 109). Usu in the phrase *idha vā huram vā* (S 1:12’ Dh 20; Sn 224 = J 1:96); *hurāhuram*, “from existence to existence” (Dh 344; Tha 399; Vism 107; DhA 4:43).